

Article

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Festivals, Festivities and the Tughlaqid Nobles

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Abstract:

This article is a narrative of the Muslim festivals of *Id al-Fitr*, *Id al-Azha*, *Shab-i-Bar'at*, *Ramzan*, *Muharram* and *Nauroz* observed in great royal galore and enthusiasm in the Court of the Sultans of Delhi under the monarchs of the Tughlaq dynasty. The narrative is based on the original writings as are found in medieval Muslim chronicles and historical sources like '*Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi*', '*Ijaz-i-Khusravi*' and '*Rehla*' which abidingly depict the first hand information of things relating to social, political, economic and religious life of the Sultans and courtiers of Delhi in the context of that time. This paper intends to bring into light the religious catholicity of the Sultans, Khans, Maliks, Amirs and other officers of Delhi. The power and position of the Sultan even during the days of festivity was insurmountable; and other couriers and officers used to get due respect and attention as according to their ranks and positions in the Government; whereas, the foreign dignitaries like ambassadors, messengers and travelers to the royal court too would get royal notice and consideration as they deserved. This article is, in fact, a study in socio-religious history of medieval India.

Key Words

Muslim Festivals, Message of social interaction, prosperity for humanity, Strengthen Relation between Sultan & Courtiers.

Muslim festivals, usually, were celebrated with great enthusiasm during Sultanate period and, that too by the Tughlaq Sultans and the nobles. Infact these festivals were the anniversaries of some of the most important events in the early history of Islam. The most important Muslim festivals observed by the Tughlaq Sultans and their nobles were that of *Id al-Fitr*, *Id al-Azha*, *Shab-i-Bar'at* and *Muharram*. Besides, the old Persian festivals of *Nauroz* (the beginning

of spring) was also celebrated with great pomp and zeal. Sultan Firuz Shah Tughlaq publicly organized the celebration (جشن) of these festivals (*Id*, *Shab-i-Bar'at*, and *Nauroz*), on a large scale and all the *Khans*, *Maliks* and *Amirs* along with other officials attended the festivities on these days which were marked by extravagance, pomp and display with great zeal and excitement.¹ The Moorish traveler Ibn Battuta records that all festivals were celebrated in a very magnificent and splendid manner with colourful decoration.² However, an attempt has been made, in this paper, to highlight the celebration of these festivals on the basis of contemporary historical accounts.

Id-ul-Fitr (عید):

The most prominent festival was *Id-ul-Fitr* or the festival of breaking the one month fast of *Ramzan* on the first of *Shawwal*. Contemporary historians furnish a vivid description of the celebration and festivities organized on the occasion of *Id*. It is marked with great pomp and festivity. Amir Khusrau described that on seeing the new moon the people broke the fast and congregated to enjoy festivities. He further referred to the beating of drum, nine times, to announce the happy termination of the fast. Thus the Sultan, the nobles and the courtiers went to *Idgah* (mosque for *Id* prayer) to offer the *dogana* (two *rakat* prayer of *Id*). On this occasion garments of fine linen and silken clothes (*Qasabaha*) were worn and children were also dressed in silken garments (*harir*). Conventional bread and *halwah*, placed on trays, were sent as presents from house to house. The *Gulabdan* (vessel for rose-water) was in constant use and so was the sprinkling of perfumes and rose water.³ The sixth day *Id* (*Shesh-i-Id*) was also celebrated with preparation of special dish of white cakes (*Ruqaq*).⁴

Royal Procession on the day of *Id*:

In the early hours of the morning of the *Id*, the Sultan accompanied by Princes, nobles, grandees of the empire and courtiers proceeded to *Idgah* in a Royal procession. Royal elephants were adorned with silk, gold and jewels for this procession. In front of Sultan's elephant, the *naqibs* and well dressed slaves marched as escorts. *Sadr-i-Jahan* (Chief Justice) Kamaluddin of Ghazna, *Sadr-i-Jahan* Nasiruddin of Khwarizm and other Qazis and prominent persons rode on elephants pronounced *Allah-o-Akbar* loudly. The nobles (*amir*) with their especial detachment holding their trumpets and flags stood in attendance outside the palace. Nobles like Mubarak Khan, Bahram Khan, Malik Firuz, Wazir of Sultan, Malik Mujir and Malik Qabula followed Sultan respectively with their insignia and troops. Then other nobles like Malik Nukbia, Malik Bughra, Malik Mukhlis and Malik Qutbul-Mulk came with their insignias. The great nobles, as

usual, rode in the company of Sultan on this occasion. Some others followed the Sultan without their insignia and troops. In *Idgah*, all nobles, *Qazis* (Judges) and '*aizza* (Foreigners) held their respected places and then offered the prayers.⁵

Ibn Battuta gives us interesting information about the celebration of *Id* at the capital in the absence of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Accordingly on *Id* day, *Khatib* (Orators) mounted on an elephant and *Muezzins* rode before him, also on elephants, calling out *Allah-o-Akbar*. While others were on horse back distributing charity on their way to *Idgah*. After the congregational prayer and sermon, they returned to the royal palace. At palace a dinner was arranged for *Maliks*, *Amirs* and foreigners.⁶

Afif's description of the celebration of *Id* indicates that the preparation started one day before *Id*. Sultan himself supervised the preparations and even asked his nobles to supervise the events.⁷ Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq was very particular in sending robes to all his *Amirs*, *Maliks*, *Khans* and courtiers, notables and officials in the preceding night of *Id*.⁸

As for preparation and decoration on the day of *Id*, in words of Afif, the seven courtyards of the Royal palace at Firuzabad were artistically decorated with the leaves of trees (برگ درختان نرگ). The nobles and others were present, on this occasion, at the court to celebrate the festival. The *Darbar-i-Aam* was arranged in the Central Courtyard (Mahal-i-Pasheb/پا شیب) in which two wooden doors were erected and series of plant pots were placed near the courtyard. It is worth noting that some artificial plants (*nihaal*) were decorated with silken soft linen (ابریشم/*abr-resham*), or white cloth (جامه سپید/*jama-i-saped*) to resemble silver or gold. Wax candles (موم/*mom*) and flowers were also used in decoration. Alongside with the artificial plants, the original plants were placed, probably, to make impression of originals. The walls of Central Courtyard were covered with hanging silken clothes (جامه نرمینه/*jama-i-narmina*). Carpets (*jamkhana-i-lashkari*) were spread out on the whole ground. Dry fruits as well as ripe fruits (جنس میرا نرو خشک/*jins-i-mewa, tar wa khushk*) were arranged on the tables. The Sultan Firoz Shah held the audience in the mid-day (چالفت) alongwith Malik Ibrahim Naib Barbak. The soldiers wearing the swords (بندگان تیغدار/*bandgan-i-tegdar*) entered the courtyard first. Then twenty one canopies (*chatr*) of different colours, such as red, green, multi coloured, black, white, pink, grey, milky white, woven golden etc. were placed on right and left sides (*maimana* and *maisara*); ten on left and ten on right and one on the head of the Sultan. Thereafter it the royal standards were brought in and then celebration started.⁹

Id Darbar:

On the day of *Id*, the *Id darbar* commenced and for that purpose, the council hall was decorated. On that occasion, the *Qazis*, *Saiyids*, *Mashaikhs*, Sultan's relatives, foreigners, wazirs, commanders of the troops, military officials as well as senior slaves presented in the council hall, first saluted the Sultan and then took their respective places. After the greetings, dinner was served to all according to their ranks. Huge arrangements were made for the celebration of *Id* at *Id darbar*. Three high ranking amirs, Malik Imad-ul-Mulk Sartez, Malik Nukbia, and Yusuf Bughra stood up at three different gates, while others stood up according to their respective ranks. Malik Taghi, *Shahna-i-Bargah* (Prefect of the Palace) holding a gold staff while his deputy having silver staff, stood in rows. Then *wazir* and secretaries stood, followed by the chamberlains and the palace officers.¹⁰

After the nobles (*Khans*, *Maliks* and *Amirs*), the other officials of *Diwan-i-Rasalat*, *Diwan-i-Qaza*, *Diwan-i-Wazarat* and *Diwan-i-Arz* along with their subordinates paid respect to the Sultan and held their respective seats in the audience hall.¹¹ They were then awarded robes of honour according to their ranks.¹² Musicians (*Qawwal*), dancers and singers were part of these festivities and entertained the audience. After their performance they were rewarded by the Sultan. Afif mentions that on this occasion singers worn saffron coloured dresses with red turbans, while the dancers wore embroidered and ornamental robes valued forty thousand tankas each. The day of joy was made more meaningful by the Sultan when he manumitted the slaves and arranged their marriages.¹³

On this occasion, all the prized, elegant and ornamented standards were displayed before Sultan Firuz, while standards of horsemen were not allowed to be brought on that day. Afterwards, the horses of royal stables, duly decorated with silver saddles were presented. Similarly the royal elephants fully decorated alongwith their seat stands, having multi coloured hangings, were brought. The elephants offered salutations after performing *Sijda* (touching the ground) and howled in felicitations to the Sultan. After these salutations, they took their positions in the right and left wings. The hunted animals and birds were also displayed by the officials of the hunting house.¹⁴

Id-i-Qurban:

Id-i-Qurban (festival of sacrifice) was held in commemoration of the Prophet Abraham and his son, Ismail, on the 10th of *Zilhijja*.¹⁵ As regards the festival of sacrifice an ox, sheep or camel was sacrificed. Amir Khusrau mentions the sacrifice of *Gusfand* (a sheep, a ram and a goat) after offering the usual prayer

with three days of *Tashriq* (turning the face eastwards) and saying 'Takbir' (*Allah-o-Akbar*).¹⁶

***Shab-i-Bar'at* (شب بارات):**

Besides the two *Ids*, festival like *Shab-i-Bar'at*, was also celebrated with great éclat, in the court. The 14th day of the month of *Shaban* and the night preceding the 15th is generally called *Shab-i-Bar'at* which is appropriated to the commemoration of the dead ancestors and saintly personages. On this occasion they made offerings and oblation to the deceased personages. It was believed that Divine predestinator bestows what is necessary for the support of life on the 14th of *Shaban*, thus the night after it also called *Shab-i-Bedari* or nocturnal vigils. Amir Khusrau in his *Ijaz-i-Khusravi* records that "commission or assignment of various kinds occurred on the occasion along with exemptions and immunity". Thus he described the 14th night of the month of *Shaban* as *Lail-i-Mubarak Barat* and *Rozi-i-Qismat-i-Mubarak*, referred to the observance of manifold prayers and night vigils.¹⁷

It was believed that with the beginning of the month of *Sh'aban*, the arrangements for the celebration and fire works were ordered by the Sultan. Fire works for the nights were collected in huge quantity. Regarding the celebration on this occasion Amir Khusrau mentions the illumination and fire play of the children. He mentions that little innocent children, who shall be the inhabitants of Paradise and whom the fire of hell can never touch, freely indulged in playing with fireworks and throwing the fireworks, thinking that it is fair on their part to do so. With the fire play, the entire town looked carnation-coloured garden like bright coloured red rose, according to him which had transformed into the Garden of Ibrahim. Further, every one, according to his means, sent lamps to the mosques for illumination. While others offered prayers in their houses on that night. Amir Khusrau also wished to burn the lamp of light in his own house and enlighten it with prayers.¹⁸

On this occasion of *Shab-i-Bar'at* four temporary structures (چهار النک *alang*) were constructed under the names of *Alang-i-Khass* (النک خاص) rescues for the Sutan), *Alang-i-Malik Naib Barbak*, *Alang-i-Malik Ali*, and *Alang-i-Malik Yaqub*. On all these structures drums and bands (طبل و دمامه) were beaten, and the entire ground was so well-illuminated that it looked like a bright day with large numbers of earthen lamps (چراغ *chiraag*) and flames (مشعل *mashal*). Lamps and flames were placed in the boats (کشتیا *kashti*). Drums were beaten (*tabal*) and bands were played for three nights of the 13th, 14th and 15th *Sh'aban*, on the occasion of *Shab-i-Bar'at*. Several kinds of crackers and fireworks (گوناگون *go-*

na-go) were set off. Nobles, officials, commoners and other people gathered to watch the fireworks and lightening at Firuzabad palace. Princes, *Khans* and *Maliks* were all present on this festivity.¹⁹ Thus, the festival was celebrated with great pomp and show. A modern scholar has argued that this festival was copied from the Hindu festival of *Shiva-ratri*, considering this night vigil and fireworks common to both the festivals.²⁰

Ramzan (رمضان):

Referring to the month of *Ramzan*, Amir Khusrau mentions that, it is the month of fasts when lips and mouth are completely sealed in respect of food and drink. The fast of *Tai* (continuous fasting for three days observed by sufi saints) was observed. The 19th and the 27th of *Ramzan* were treated as *Lailat-ul-Qadr* or *Shab-i-Qadr* (when Quran descended from Heaven). The fast was broken at evening with such kinds of drinks as *fuqa* (made of water and barley, and often of grapes) and band sweets named *zaliba-i-nabat* (*jalebi*), *lozina* (a confection of almonds). Friends and relatives were invited to attend the dinner everyday.²¹

Muharram (محرم) and Ashura:

The first ten days of the first Arabic month Muharram, are held sacred on account of the martyrdom of Hussain, son of Ali and Fatima at Karbala. The 10th of the month is called *Ashura* which is the day of celebration of the *Muharram* festival. Amir Khusrau describes the ten days and the *Ashura* as the days of the martyrdom of Hussain for which even the pen was in mourning. In his words, 'the benedictory prayer offered throughout these ten days, has been received and the same time *Kuhl-ul-Jawahir*²² (collyrium mixed with ground pearls) placed in the special *Surma-dan* (antimony box) and folded within paper has been delivered to this sincere one (from a Sayyad). My pupil of the eye accepted it and it was applied to the black part of the eye. There was the book entitled *Maqatal-i-Husain*²³ had also been read. Because of the dust on the ground of that martyrdom which serves as an antimony for the penetrating sight of the true believers, that book had become so torn to pieces as you would say that in lamenting the fate of the Prophet's family members the garment got torn and was afflicted; and its leaves had become highly disordered as if you would think that it had been struck at Karbala by a stormy wind'.²⁴ We find frequent mention of the use of collyrium or antimony in the eyes especially on the *Ashura* or the 10th of *Muharram*, and the observance of *Roza-i-Maryam* or *Saum-i-Maryam* or *Saum-i-Samt* which means the three day's fast in complete silence in the month of *Rajab*.²⁵ On this occasion people celebrated the mourning anniversary of the martyred grandson of the Prophet by throwing black dust on their heads and wearing a black robe of lamentations.²⁶

References denote the distribution of alms and charities among the poor and the destitute beggars. Ibn Battuta mentions that on the tenth of *Muharram*, he himself distributed hundred maunds of flour and an equal amount of meat to the poor. Thus food was offered to bless the soul of Hazrat Imam Husain.²⁷ Similarly food was also being distributed to feed the people on the occasion of great festivals such as *Id al-Fitr*, *Id al-Azha*, birthday of the Prophet (*Milad-un-Nabi*), on the day of *Ashura* (10th of *Muharram*), and in the night of mid-*Sha'ban* which consisting of a hundred maunds of flour and another hundred maunds of meat.²⁸

Nauroz (نوروز):

Spring festival *Nauroz* was also celebrated with great gaiety and mirth. It had a great significance during the medieval period. This was the great festival of the new year's day of the Persian calendar and had been borrowed from Persia. Amir Khusrau mentions the celebration of *Nauroz*.²⁹ According to Badaoni, it fell on the first *farwardin* (first month of the Persian year).³⁰ The Tughlaq Sultans celebrated *Nauroz* like that of *Id*. To celebrate *Nauroz* pavilion was constructed and *Khans*, *Maliks*, nobles and officials participated in the festival. Poets and singers adorned the festivals with their art and skill. However, it was the most gorgeous and spectacular of all the festivals which lasted for nine days.³¹

To conclude festivals were a restive feature of the court culture in the Tughlaq period. These events were celebrated with great gaiety and were sources of fun and entertainment for the ruling classes. At the same time, they also served to strengthen the bonds between the rulers and the ruling aristocracy, bringing them together through display and entertainment. While doing so, the rituals and ceremonies that were followed on these occasions legitimated imperial authority and reinforced the hierarchies in the court culture.

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23. This book appears to have been the earliest of the Elegiac works in India on the tragedy of Karbala, now lost.
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